

THE SASSANIANS IN SIND

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THE SASSANIANS IN SIND.

(By N. M. Billimoria).

(Read before the Sind Historical Society on 15th January 1941).

The Kusana Empire reached the zenith of its glory in the reign of Kaniska; the empire extended from Iran to the borders of Bengal. The mighty Kusanas ruled over Indian territory consisting of Gandhra, the Punjab, the United Provinces, Central India, Sind, Malwa, Bihar and Orisa. Outside India the sway extended over Kasgar, Yarkand, Khotan, and Afghanistan. During the lifetime of Kaniska the dominions of Central Asia were lost. The last of the great Kusana Kings was Vasudeva I. It is worth knowing why such a magnificent government disappeared after a rule of two or three generations. One of the chief causes is the rise of a power in Asia—the dynasty founded by Ardashir I (224-241 A.D.) internal dissensions and succession of weak rulers being other causes—.

Papak, a descendant of Sasan flourished near Shiraz. His son Ardashir (224-241 A.D.) founded an empire; he took the title of Malka Airan, and later on Malka Airan, that is King of Airan and King of Kings of Airan. His kingdom was founded four years after the death of Vasudeva I. Gibbon in Vol. I of the Decline & Fall of Roman Empire states about Ardashir that he fought wild Scythians and effeminate Indians. Tabari also relates after Ardashir's conquests of the countries bordering on Khorasan, Marv, Balkh, and Khwarizm, he returned to Fars, and halted at Gor, where the kings of Kusanas, Turan, and Mukran visited him and offered their allegiance. According to Prof. Herzfeld Turan represents the modern districts of Quzdar, south of Quetta. Mukran is the desert tract of land stretching along the coasts of the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.

Within Four years of the death of Vasudeva, the last link of the Kusanas with their homeland in Central Asia was snapped by the conquest of Balkh by Ardashir. Moreover by the conquests of Khorasan, Marv, & ca. the frontiers of Mokrān, Turan and Kabul came near the Sassanian dominions. Therefore they all three hastened to seek the Sassanian alliance. It is not certain whether Ardashir actually went to Mokrān or against the latter Kusanas of the Kabul Valley. The Kushanshah (probably the later Kusana King of Afghanistan) weakened by the loss of Balkh

retreated to Kabul; He took his loss philosophically and entered into a treaty of amity with his powerful new neighbour. This assumption is supported by the fact that the Kabul region was annexed to the Sassanian dominions at a later date.

Shahpur I succeeded Ardashir in 241 A.D. He made a significant change in the royal title; Ardashir I was styled, *Malan malka Airan*, King of kings of Iran; but this successor called himself *Malkan malka Airan va Aniran*, King of Kings of Iran and non-Iran. The next ruler Hormizd I (272-273 A.D.) ruled for only a year. The next ruler was Vahran I (273-276 A.D.) ruled for a short time. Vahran II followed him (276-293 A.D.); he had to contend against an invasion by Emperor Aurelius Carus, and rebellion by his brother Hormizd. In 283 A.D. Emperor Aurelius Carus recommenced war against Iran and occupied Ctesiphon and Sleukia, practically without any opposition. Vahran II was forced to make peace with him agreeing to cede Armenia and Mesopotamia.

Hormizd was assisted by the Sakas, Kusans and Gelans; they were not independent of the Iranian authority, otherwise they would not have taken part in this fratricidal struggle. They had their own grievances. The Kushanshah aided the brother in hopes that the civil war would weaken the Sassanian monarchy, and he would be able to regain his lost possession on the other side of the Hindu-Kush. The Sakas joined that if Hormizd was successful they might get rid of the irksome tribute which Ardashir or his immediate successor imposed on them. The rebellion was crushed. He subjugated the Sakas for, Rawlinson in the *Seventh Great Oriental Monarchy* says "Vahran II engaged in war with Segestani (Sakas?) and appears to have reduced them to subjection". After consolidating his position in Sakastan, Vahran appointed his son as Sakanshah (Governor of Sakastan). Prof. Herzfeld informs us that it was always the prerogative of the heir-apparent to be the governor of the latest conquered province, the most important part of the Empire (Herzfeld, *Kushano-Sassanian Coins*, *Memoir of the Arch. Survey of India*, No. 38, page 35). Prof. Herzfeld thinks that the conquest of Vahran was very extensive. viz. the satrapy of Sakastan included Bactria, the whole of Khorasan, Mekran, Turan, lands along the middle course of the Indus and its mouth; Cutch, Kathiawad, Malwa &c. The only exceptions were the Kabul valley and the Punjab, which continued to be ruled by the later Kusanas. At a later date however the Kusana kings seem to have lost Kabul also. This is proved by two inscriptions of the

reign of Shahpur II (309-379 A.D.) found by Prof. Herzfeld at Persepolis. To sum up, Ardashir took Balkh in A.D. 225. Sind Baluchistan were conquered by Varhran II, who appointed his son as the Viceroy of the newly conquered province. He failed to conquer Kabul, but at a later date it was added to the Sassanian dominions. In 338 A.D. the Huns conquered Balkh; in that year the Sassanian dominion over Balkh and the Kabul region came to an end. But the fact when and how Mekran, Turan, Mekan, Sindh, and other Indian possessions were lost is uncertain.

We have more than sufficient proofs to show that the Sassanian conquest of certain parts of India was not a myth.

1. Gibbon declared that Ardashir Papakhan, the founder of the Sassanian dynasty fought with the Scythians and the effeminate Indians.
2. Tabari also relates that at Gars in Fars, Ardashir was visited by the Kings of Kusan, Turan and Makuran, who acknowledged their allegiance.
3. Ferista records a tradition about an invasion of India by Ardashir.

Besides literature we have numismatic proofs. A coin was found in the Jhelum district; on this on the obverse near ~~the right~~ margin outside the spear held by the king's left hand occurs the legend *Shilada* under the left arms *Pasana* and *Nu* under his left arm. The figure of a Sassanian monarch could not have been put on a coin of Shilada Kusana, unless he had submitted himself to the Persian King. It is not at all surprising that due to commercial intercourse indigenous Sassanian coins later or earlier date are found in contiguous countries.

The legends on Sassanian coins undoubtedly point to Sassanian domination over Kusana territories. Prof. Herzfeld finds two different scripts on his Kusano-sassanian coins; (1) Greek cursive script derived from Bactrian Greeks and continued by the great Kusana King, Kaniska, Huviska and Vasudeva, and (2) legends in Sassanian Pahlavi of the 3rd century A.D. or more correctly speaking Parasik script. These are bilingual coins; Parasik on the obverse and Greek upon the reverse. Centuries ago, when Greeks occupied Bactria and Afghanistan, the conquerors began to issue coins with Greek legend on the obverse, and Kharosthi, a language then prevalent in NW Provinces of India and Afghanistan on the reverse.

In many legends on coins, the Iranian kings described as over-lords of the Kusanas (Kusana malka or Kusana malkan malka).

In a drachm in the British Museum on which there is the legend Mazdayan bagi Pirozi raba Kusan malka, meaning Mazda worshipping divinity Piroz the great king of the Kusanas.

Coins of Sassanian type and fabric bearing legends in Indian script and the so-called Parasik writing were current to a very late date in North Western India. Rapson (Indian Coins) is of opinion that they were issued by a Sassanian dynasty ruling over Multan and Sindh.

The excavations at the Stupa area at Mohenjo Daro have revealed about two thousand coins; they may be classified as follows: (1) about 338 coins of Vasudeva I, the Kushan king, bearing the standing royal figure on the obverse and the figure of Siva and the Bull, or a goddess sitting on a throne on the reverse. The (2) class, 1823 rectangular or oblong coins bearing a nimbate figure, the cross, trident, series of pellets &ca. on one side or the other, but without any legends. The 3rd group consists of 9 oblong or circular pieces with the device of a fire-altar on one side and a crude human figure on the other, and similarly without legends. Of the three classes of coins mentioned above, No. 2 is the most important; these coins are cast and not diestruck and are specimens of the indigenous currency of Sind.

The majority of coins from the Stupa site being either contemporaneous with Vasudeva or demonstrably later in date, it is reasonable to conclude that the Buddhists occupied Mohenjodaro about the beginning of the third century A.D. and held it till the fifth century A.D. which is the approximate date assignable to coins of class (2) mentioned above. According to one scholar the altar found in class (3) coins is a very welcome feature. Such a device occurs on coins of Kidra Kusanas when they were under the influence of the Sassanians. Their occurrence here probably suggests the same idea, i.e. the Kidra-Kusanas issued these coins when Sindh was included within the Sassanian Empire.

It will be seen that on coins of class (2) many of the devices are cut away and are consequently incomplete. Evidently the local monyers started from a cast copper sheet which was made into a number of strips. The desired weight and size were next obtained by cutting these strips into separate pieces. In this

process they were necessarily obliged to cut away many of the devices which were intended to be borne by each individual coin. Thus in the manufacture of these coins the moneyers of Sind seemed to have followed practically the same method as that adopted in the case of the earliest Indian coinage.

Let us examine some of the old inscriptions. An inscription found at Persepolis reads: Sakanshah hinde sakastanu Tukhristan dabiran dabir, meaning King (Viceroy?) of Sakastan, minister of ministers of Sindh, Sakastan and Tukharistan; it was written in the 2nd year 310-11 A.D. of Shahpur II, 309-379, A.D.

Paikuli is the name of a locality in the mountains of Kurdistan. On a high mountain saddle on the southern slope of Zadakiaw, lie the ruins of a structure built in Sassanian times, now called *Butkhana* by the local people. It had a long inscription, probably built into its walls, but now in a very fragmentary condition. It purports to give an account of the war of succession that followed the death of Varhran II between his son Varhran III (293 A.D.) and Narseh, son of Shahpur I (A.D. 241-272).

When Narseh was victorious, the neighbouring kings and vassals came to congratulate him on his success. A list of these is given in the inscription— independent kings are mentioned—we find the Caesar, and the Kushan-Shah; then follow the names of kings, who are vassals of the Sassanian emperor; in this class we find the names of Spondorat king of Paradan (Paradas), king of Makuran (Mekran) and the king of Abhira. Then come the names of satraps of all kinds, such as Saurashtra &c.

We come to the explorations of Jhukar mounds. Jhukar is situated to the east of the village of Mithodero, about six miles due west of Larkana. There are two mounds at the site. The explorations yielded interesting evidence of the occupation of the site from Chalcolithic period till Sassanian times. Mr. Majumdar worked in this area and the result is described by him in his "Explorations in Sind". He writes that excavations in Mound B brought to light the remains of buildings made of sun-dried bricks; over fifty rooms of varying dimensions were cleared, where a large collection of pottery vessels, copper coins, inscribed sealings were found; but nothing pre-historic. The coins found were bearing inscriptions in characters of the Gupta period, not earlier than the fifth century A.D. A unique terracotta sealing was found bearing evidently Pahlavi characters, and a male bust showing striking resemblance to that on some of the coins of

the White Hun. As the White Hun coins belong to the 5th century A.D. this sealing should also belong to the same period. It can be concluded that the houses found were built in or about the 5th century A.D. Not a single coin of the Arab rulers of Sind like those from Bhambor and Bramanabad was found, hence we conclude that the settlement did not continue up to the Arab times.

In Sind painted pottery has a continuity of tradition unparalleled elsewhere. It is practised even up to this day and it is well established that it occurred as early as the Chalcolithic age. Evidence of its use in the Indo-Sassanian time now is found in Jhukar. The designs are generally floral and show a great variety. They are painted black and red; also yellow, chocolate, pink and cream colours are also employed. Painted flagons, like those found in Jhukar have been found by Sir Aurel Stein at Jiwanri in Makran. Two glazed amphoras, as well as pieces of numerous other glazed jars were found at Jhukar. Glazed ware was also found at Bahmanabad, which cannot be earlier than the 8th century A.D. about his time the Arab occupied Sind. About this time glazed pottery was much in vogue at Mesopotamia, as at Samara, also in Central Asia. The earliest piece in the Stein Collection at Delhi which is very much like the glazed ware from Jhukar, is one from Loulan very likely dating from the 4th Century A.D. This class of pottery seems to occur first in Persia in Sassanian times, although glazed fabric itself can be traced to a much earlier date. In the 3rd Century A.D. during the reign of Varhran II (276-293 A.D.) Sind along with Eastern Iran was annexed to the Sassanian Kingdom. Rawlinson in his "THE SEVENTH GREAT ORIENTAL MONARCHY, page 298, writes about Varahan V (420-440 A.D.) that "the adventures of Varahan in India, and the enlargement of his dominions in that direction by the act of the Indian king, who is said to have voluntarily ceded to him Mekran and Scinde in return for his services against the Emperor of China cannot be regarded as historical. Scarcely more so is the story that Persia had no musicians in his day, for which reason he applied to the Indian monarch, and obtained from him twelve thousand performers, who became the ancestors of the Lurs.

It is possible that during that period glazed pottery of the style found at Jhukar began to be manufactured in Sind under Sassanian influence. Incised decoration is found on the interior of a group of saucers, which are not painted. The motifs are lotus, branches and forms of other plants and geometrical devices

such as the swastica, triangles and concentric circles. In some of the designs the influence of Sassanian art is traceable. The design on a saucer reminds us of a foliated pattern on the monuments at Taq-i-Bustan. The late Mr. Majumdar in his *Exploration in Sind* continues "As regards decoration in relief mention may be made of an open bowl with pimples all over the outer surface; another vessel with female figures holding the lyre and a third showing a number of Budha figures seating in the preaching attitude. The pimpled vessel is of special interest as it shows the survival down to historic times of a mode of decoration of which the earliest examples come from the chalcolithic strata of Mohenjo-daro. It is similar to the "barbotine" ware of Roman times and such pimpled pots occur also as late as the 11 Century A.D. in Nubia. In shape and mode of decoration the vessel with figures in relief is comparable to the one from Depar Ghaddi Bahmanabad, described by Cousens on page 138 of the *Archaeological Survey Report* for the year 1903-1904.

The Barbotine decoration was produced by roughening the walls of the vessel. These are sometimes worked up into a thorny surface resembling that of certain forms of crustacean, like common mediterranean crab or the shell of a sea urchin and such natural objects doubtless supplied suggestions for it.

To the above I add a part of my paper the *Iranians in Ancient India* published at pages 50-54, Vol. II part IV, March 1937.

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